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PRRC emerging trends

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Spiritual Growth Seen As Top Priority For Christians

PRINCETON, N.J. – Spiritual growth is named more often than evangelism, supporting community causes, strengthening the local church, and influencing legislation as the top priority for Christians.

But one's priorities depend in considerable measure on whether one is a religious liberal or conservative, an evangelical or non-evangelical. Conservatives place evangelism (helping to win the world for Jesus Christ) first, while liberals name spiritual growth. A similar pattern is found in the case of evangelicals and non-evangelicals.

Catholics and Protestants also have different priorities, with Catholics placing far less emphasis than Protestants on evangelism. The question:

Regardless of whether or not you consider yourself a Christian, which one of these actions would you say should be the top priority of Christians?

The findings (given below) are from a study conducted for The Robert H. Schuller Ministries, in which in-person interviews with 1,522 adults, 18 and older, were conducted in 1984.

Top Priority for Christians

	National	Protestants	Catholics	Conservatives	Moderates	Liberals	Evangelicals	Non-Evangelicals
Concentrate on the spiritual growth of one's family and self	39%	37%	43%	39%	44%	40%	26%	42%
Help to win the world for Jesus Christ	27	35	18	48	24	24	62	18
Support causes to improve the entire community	15	12	17	4	15	24	4	18
Strengthen the local church	6	6	7	4	7	2	5	6
Influence local, state and national legislation on important issues	5	4	7	4	6	6	2	6
No opinion	8	6	8	1	4	4	1	10
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Traditional Beliefs Show Decline In British Gallup Survey

Traditional beliefs among the British have declined somewhat over the last five years, as discovered in a recent survey undertaken by Social Surveys (Gallup Poll), Ltd.

The proportion who believe in a personal God, for example, has declined from 36% in 1981 to 31% in the current survey, while those who believe Jesus Christ was the son of God has fallen off from 52% in 1981 to 48% today. And fewer today than five years ago believe the Bible to be essential to the Christian Church – 68% compared to 63% in the current survey.

Here are the questions and national results in full. Interviewing in the latest survey was conducted July 10–15, 1986. Please note that some tables do not add to 100% due to rounding.

1. Which, if any, of the following do you believe in?

		Today %	1981 %
a) The devil:	Yes	21	21
	No	74	73
	Don't know	5	7
b) Hell:	Yes	21	21
	No	73	72
	Don't know	6	7
c) Heaven:	Yes	52	53
	No	42	37
	Don't know	6	10
d) God:	Yes	68	73
	No	26	19
	Don't know	6	8
e) Reincarnation:	Yes	25	28
	No	62	57
	Don't know	13	15

2. Which of these statements comes closest to your beliefs?

	Today %	1981 %
There is a personal God	31	36
There is some sort of spirit or lifeforce	41	37
I don't know what to think	11	15
I don't really think there is any sort of spirit, God or a lifeforce	16	12

3. Do you believe that Jesus Christ was the son of God or just a man?

	Today %	1981 %
Son of God	48	52
Just a man	32	31
Just a story	8	5
Don't know	11	11

4. Which of these comes nearest to expressing your views about the Old Testament?

	Today %	1981 %
It is of divine authority and its commands should be followed without question	10	14
It is mostly of divine authority but some of it needs interpretation	38	34
It is mostly a collection of stories and fables	45	42
Don't know	8	10

5. Which of these comes nearest to expressing your views about the New Testament?

	Today %	1981 %
It is of divine authority and its commands should be followed without question	13	14
It is mostly of divine authority but some of it needs interpretation	39	39
It is mostly a collection of stories and fables	39	34
Don't know	9	14

6. Do you think that the Bible is essential to the Christian Church or would the Church still survive even if the idea that the Bible is of divine authority were to be rejected?

	Today %	1981 %
Is essential	63	68
Church will survive	29	24
Don't know	8	8

Growing Support Found for Ban on Sex Violence in Movies, Magazines

A growing majority of Americans support an outright ban on the portrayal of sexual violence in magazines, movies, and video cassettes.

In a recent survey, 73% want a ban in their communities on the sale or rental of video cassettes displaying sexual violence (up 10 points from a March 1985 survey), 74% a ban on theatrical showing of movies depicting sexual violence (up 6 points), and 73% a ban on magazines that show sexual violence (up 3 points).

Of the roughly one-fourth who oppose such a ban, only a very small proportion, 4% to 6%, want no restrictions whatsoever.

More Liberal on Non-Violent Sex

The public is more liberal when it comes to the portrayal of non-violent sex, but here, too, there has been an increase in favor of community restrictions.

Fewer than half of Americans favor a ban on magazines that show nudity or adults having sexual relations, theaters presenting X-rated movies, and the sale or rental of X-rated cassettes for home viewing. But more people today than in 1985 favor some kind of restriction in the case of most of these activities—either a ban or no public display.

Almost universal support, 92%, is found for a ban on the sale or rental of video cassettes featuring sexual acts involving children.

Oppose Easing Standards

The public continues to oppose easing community standards covering the sale of sexually explicit material. Currently, 45% say local standards should be tougher compared to 5% who say they should be less strict; 43% feel they should be kept as they are now. Little change in views has occurred on this question from two earlier surveys, last year's and in 1977.

The survey also reveals a close division of opinion on the question of whether there should be a single nationwide standard in determining obscenity or whether each community should set its own standards. Only one person in 14 (7%) feels there should be no standards whatsoever.

This question measures attitudes toward specific activities:

As I read you some items, please tell me if you feel each one should be totally banned *for sale to adults, sold to adults as long as there is no* public display, *or sold to adults with* no restrictions?

Here are the 1986 findings compared with those from a 1985 survey (from a NEWSWEEK Poll, conducted by The Gallup Organization and based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,020 adults in March, 1985). The 1985 figures are shown in parentheses:

Depictions of Sex in Media

	Total %	No public display %	No restrictions %
*Sale or rental of video cassettes featuring sexual acts involving children	92	5	2
Sale or rental of video cassettes featuring sexual violence	73 (63)	19 (23)	6 (13)
Theaters showing movies that depict sexual violence	74 (68)	18 (21)	6 (9)
Magazines that show sexual violence	76 (73)	18 (20)	4 (6)
Magazines that show nudity	29 (21)	51 (52)	18 (26)
Magazines that show adults having sexual relations	49 (47)	40 (40)	9 (12)
Theaters showing X-rated movies	43 (40)	38 (37)	16 (20)
Sale or rental of X-rated video cassettes for home viewing	36 (32)	43 (39)	19 (27)

*Not asked in 1985.

NOTE: "Don't know" responses omitted.

Men and women hold sharply different views on the eight activities surveyed, with men an average of 12 points less likely to favor a ban.

Sharp differences are also recorded on the basis of age, with young adults (18-29) far more liberal than their elders. Catholics are consistently more liberal than are Protestants, largely because of the conservative views held by evangelicals within the Protestant group.

Here are the other questions and the trends:

Do you think the standards in your community regarding the sale of sexually explicit material should be stricter than they are now, not as strict, or kept as they are now?

Community Standards

	Stricter	Less strict	Kept as they are now	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
1986	45	5	43	7
1985	43	4	48	5
1977	45	6	35	14

In determining whether a book, magazine, or movie is obscene, do you think there should be a single, nationwide standard or do you think each community should have its own standard?

Nationwide or Community Standard

	Nationwide	Community	None*	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
1986	45	43	7	5
1985	47	43	5	5
1977	45	39	9	7

*Volunteered

The latest figures are based on 1,539 in-person interviews with adults, 18 and older, conducted in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation between July 11-14, 1986.

For findings based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 3 percentage points in either direction. In addition to sampling error, the reader should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. *These statements conform to the disclosure standards of the National Council of Public Polls.*

Drugs Now Seen Among Nation's Top Concerns

Unemployment, international tensions, the federal budget deficit, and drugs are seen by the American public as the top problems facing the nation today.

About equal proportions name unemployment (23%) and international tensions (22%). Named next most often are the budget deficit (13%) and drug abuse (8%).

While drug abuse is still overshadowed by economic and foreign policy problems, it has grown dramatically as a key domestic concern of the American people. Today's figure of 8% is far higher than found in all previous Gallup audits of the last four decades.

Further evidence of the growing concern over drug abuse is found in the latest survey of public attitudes toward public schools, a project jointly conducted by The Gallup Poll and Phi Delta Kappa, Inc. For the first time since this education series was initiated almost two decades ago, a problem other than discipline was seen by the public as the most important problem facing public schools. Almost three in 10 (28%) named drugs—a 10-point increase over the previous year's figure.

Also, a recent Gallup Youth Survey reported that teenagers consider drug abuse far and away as the top problem facing the teenage population. This problem was cited by 40% of teens, far ahead of the next problems named—alcohol abuse (14%), unemployment (8%) and peer pressures (also 8%).

Most Important Problem

Unemployment	23%
International tensions, fear of war	22
Budget deficit	13
Drug abuse	8
Economy (general)	7
Poverty, hunger	6
High cost of living, taxes	4
Crime	3
Moral, religious decline	3
All others	24
No opinion	3
	115%

NOTE: Total adds to more than 100% due to multiple responses.

The latest findings are based on 1,539 in-person interviews with adults, 18 and older, conducted in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation between July 11-14, 1986.

Catholic Church Gets High Marks for Dealing with Non-Christians, Laity

U.S. Catholics give their church high marks for its relations with non-Christians and for handling the role of the laity, such as encouraging greater participation on the part of rank-and-file Catholics.

Opinions are more closely divided when it comes to "changes in the Church since the Second Vatican Council," and are negative on three other policies or practices – the role of women, the Church's involvement in politics and public policy, and its marriage annulment system.

A representative national sample of the nation's Catholics was also asked to rate the Church on serving the needs of seven key population groups. The Church is given high marks for the way it has served families and the elderly, while it receives mixed grades on serving "one's own needs" and those of minorities.

Ratings shift to the negative side on the job the Church is doing in serving the needs of new immigrants, single people, and separated, divorced and remarried Catholics.

These questions were asked of Roman Catholics:

What kind of job do you think the Catholic Church in the United States is doing in handling the following – excellent, good, only fair or poor?

Here are the ratings given the Church in dealing with six practices or policies, ranked in order of positive ("excellent" and "good" combined) ratings. "Only fair" and "poor" ratings combined comprise the negative assessments:

Ratings of Church Practices/Policies

	Positive %	Negative %	No opinion %
Church's relations with non-Christians	54	38	8
Role of lay people	52	41	7
Changes since 2nd Vatican Council	47	46	7
Role of women	37	60	3
Involvement in politics and public policy	27	63	10
Marriage annulment system	26	60	14

And here are Catholics' perceptions of how well the Church is serving the seven specific constituencies:

Ratings of Church's Service To Specific Constituencies

Serving needs of:	Positive %	Negative %	No opinion %
Families	58	39	3
The elderly	54	42	4
Yourself	50	46	4
Minorities	41	49	10
New immigrants	38	47	15
Single people	30	62	8
Separated, divorced, remarried Catholics	30	63	7

The findings are based on telephone interviews with 239 Roman Catholics, out of a total sample of 1,004 adults, 18 and older, conducted in scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period March 7–10.

For results based on the Catholic subsample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 9 percentage points in either direction. In addition to sampling error, the reader should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Faith Development and Your Ministry

If you preach, write, or teach, we sincerely believe you will find FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUR MINISTRY to be of great help in your work.

This new publication may be ordered from The Princeton Religion Research Center, Inc. P.O. Box 628, Princeton, N.J. 08542). The cost is $15 for 1–4 copies and $10 for 5 or more.

Who Do Americans Say That I Am?

By George Gallup, Jr. and George O'Connell

In this intriguing investigation the authors look at the religious values of American Christians. Drawing upon survey material collected for the Schuller organization and other groups, they go beyond mere head counting. Their goal is to ascertain how Americans perceive Jesus Christ in order to understand the impact He has on their lives.

Questions vitally important to the churches were asked. Among them:

- What impact has Jesus as a moral and ethical teacher had on your life?
- Where does religion fit into your value system?
- How can the churches better serve you?
- What do you consider to be the most appealing character traits of Jesus?
- How hard have you tried to follow the example of Jesus?
- How close do you think you come in following the example of Jesus?

Interviews with representative Americans bring the data down to earth. Additionally, church leaders from various denominations offer suggestions for infusing new life into the churches.

As Robert H. Schuller writes in an Afterword, "The polls and other evidence suggest that many Americans are not being served adequately by their churches even as surveys suggest that the interest in spiritual values has increased." This book contains "possibilities and insights that will benefit the Christian community."

This intriguing investigation of religious values offers significant and timely information for church officials, pastors, and educators – anyone concerned with increasing the effectiveness of church ministry. Paper, $10.95.

Available at your local bookstore or direct from the publisher (please include $1.00 per book for postage and handling): THE WESTMINSTER PRESS, 925 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107.

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